A Suitable Present for a Sorcerous Puppet

Sir Hereward and Mister Fitz - 3

Garth Nix

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Annotation

GARTH NIX grew up in Canberra, Australia. When he turned nineteen, he left to drive around the United Kingdom in a beat-up Austin with a boot full of books and a Silver-Reed typewriter. Despite a wheel literally falling off the car, he survived to return to Australia and study at the University of Canberra. He has since worked in a bookshop, as a book publicist, a publisher's sales representative, an editor, a literary agent, and as a public relations and marketing consultant. His first story was published in 1984 and was followed by novels *The Ragwitch*, *Sabriel*, *Shade's Children*, *Lirael*, *Abhorsen*, the six-book YA fantasy series the Seventh Tower, and, most recently, the seven-book the Keys to the Kingdom series. He lives in Sydney with his wife and their two children.

- A Suitable Present for a Sorcerous Puppet
  - ○

A Suitable Present for a Sorcerous Puppet
Garth Nix

Sir Hereward licked his finger and turned the page of the enormous tome that was perched precariously on a metal frame next to his sickbed. It was not a book he would have chosen to read—or rather to fossick through like a rook searching for seed in a new-sown field—but as it was the only book in the lonely tower by the sea, he had little choice. Having broken two small but important bones in his left foot, he could not range farther afield for other amusements, so reading it had to be. This particular book was entitled *The Compendium of Commonplaces* and presented itself as a collection of knowledge that should be at the command of every reasonably educated gentleman of Jerreke, a country that had ceased to exist some thousand years before, shortly after the book was printed.

The demise of Jerreke and the publication of the book were not likely to be connected, though Sir Hereward did notice that the pages were often bound out of order, or the folios were incorrect, and that there was a general carelessness with numbers. Together, these might be symptomatic of the somewhat unusual end of Jerreke, a city-state which had defaulted on its debts so enormously that its entire population had to be sold into slavery.

The finger-licking was required by the book's long, dark hibernation inside a chest up in the attic of the tower. A thoroughly damp finger was a necessary aid to the separation of the sadly gummed-together pages.

Sir Hereward sighed as he turned another page. His enthusiasm for reading had diminished in the turning of several hundred pages, with its concomitant several hundred finger-lickings, for he had found only two entries worth reading: one on how to cheat at a board game that had changed its name but was still widely played in the known world; and another on the multiplicity of uses of the root spice cabizend, some surprising number of which fell into Hereward's professional area of expertise as an artillerist and maker of incendiaries.

In fact, Hereward was about to give up and bellow to the housekeeper who kept the tower to bring him some ale, when the title of the next commonplace caught his eye. It was called "On the Propitiation of Sorcerous Puppets."

As Sir Hereward's constant companion, comrade-in-arms, and

onetime nanny was a sorcerous puppet known as Mister Fitz, this was very much of interest to the injured knight. He eagerly read on, and though the piece was short and referred solely to the more usual kind of sorcerous puppet—one made to sing, dance, and entertain—he did learn something new.

According to Doctor Professor Laxelender Prouzin, the author of this particular, far-from-commonplace entry, all sorcerous puppets shared a common birthday, much in the manner of the priests of a number of particularly jealous godlets, who allowed no individuality among their chosen servants (some of them even going as far as the Xarwashian god of bookkeeping and ware-houses, who not only refused his servants individual birthdays but referred to them all by the same name).

Sir Hereward quickly calculated this shared birthday of the puppets, transposing the Tramontic calendar that had been used in Jerreke with the more modern Adjusted Celestial, and discovered that it would occur in a matter of days, depending on whether it was currently the first or the second day of what the Adjusted Celestial calendar prosaically called “Second Month” and the Tramontics had termed “Expialomon.”

As Sir Hereward had been laid up for a week already, and had no urgent matters to attend to, he had rather lost track of the date.

“Sister Gobbe!” called out Sir Hereward. “Sister Gobbe!”

Sister Gobbe was the priestess-housekeeper who looked after the tower and its guests as a representative of the Cloister of Narhalet-Narhalit. Colloquially known as Nar-Nar, it was a gentle and kindly deity whose slow but healing powers had aided tens of thousands of petitioners over the last several millennia. This particular tower was one of the more remote bastions of Nar-Nar’s presence upon the earth, and likely to be abandoned in the not too distant future. Hence it was staffed only by Sister Gobbe and an as yet unseen novice Sir Hereward believed might be called “Sisterling Lallit”—a name he had overheard being hissed by Sister Gobbe outside his door the previous evening. There was also a guard, a small but broad-shouldered fellow with a very large ax, who doubtless could call upon Nar-Nar’s rather less well-known powers to open wounds that hadn’t even happened yet, rather than heal ones that had.

Fortunately for all concerned, Narhalet-Narhalit was far from a proscribed entity, but a welcome extrusion into the world, so the god and its followers were not an item of business for Sir Hereward and Mister Fitz. Consequently, their discovery of the tower en route from Tar’s End to Bazynghame had been a welcome opportunity for the lame and hobbling knight to rest up and let the bones in his foot knit faster than they would anywhere else.

Mister Fitz had also taken their forced rest as an opportunity to engage in some activity that he said had hitherto been impracticable on their travels, though Sir Hereward was not entirely sure what that meant. The sorcerous puppet was up to something. He had taken to exploring the sea caves that ate into the cliffs near the tower, and he returned each evening covered in a layer of what looked like salt, suggesting immersion in the ocean and subsequent drying. This was odd in a creature who usually avoided complete submersion, being made of papier-mâché and carved timber, albeit sorcerously altered, but Sir Hereward had not made enquiry. He knew that Mister Fitz would tell him of his activities in due course, if there was any need for Sir Hereward to know.

"Sir?"

It was not Sister Gobbe who appeared in the doorway, red-faced and puffing as she always was from the tightly spiraling stair, but a considerably younger and far more attractive attendant, who might have wafted her way upstairs on a beam of sunlight, for she was neither out of breath, nor was her habit or broad-brimmed hat in any disarray.

"I am Sisterling Lallit," said the vision. "Sister Gobbe has had to go into the village, to speak to Boll about the veal to go with the crayfish sauce for Your Honor's dinner. Is there anything you need?"

Sir Hereward continued to stare and failed to answer. It had been some months since he had even the slightest conversation with a beautiful woman, and he was both surprised and sadly out of practice. But as she continued to stand in the door, with her head down and her face shadowed by her hat, he recovered himself.

"My companion, Mister Fitz," he began. "The puppet, you know…"

"Yes, sir," said Sisterling Lallit. "A most wondrous puppet, and so wise."

"Yes…just so," said Sir Hereward. He wondered what Mister Fitz had been talking about with Sisterling Lallit, but pressed on. "It is his birthday on the fourth of Second Month—"

"Tomorrow!" exclaimed Lallit, proving Sir Hereward had been even more careless about the passage of time than he'd thought. She raised her hands and inadvertently looked up, to show Hereward a face of great charm and liveliness, though sadly marred by the lack of the old and faded facial scars he had been brought up to regard as necessary to true beauty. "You should have said! It will be a doing to manage a feast—"

"Mister Fitz does not eat, so a feast is superfluous," said Sir Hereward, with a dismissive wave of his hand. "However, I wish to give him a present. Given that we are leagues from any shop or

merchant, and in any case, I cannot for the moment leave my bed…I wondered if there might be something suitable in the tower that I might purchase for Mister Fitz."

"Something suitable?" asked Lallit. She tugged her earlobe and frowned, a gesture Sir Hereward found irresistible. "I don't know…"

"Come and sit by me," said Sir Hereward. He slid over and patted the mattress by his side. "To begin with, you can tell me what is in the attic above. Most particularly, a musical instrument would meet the need."

Doctor Professor Laxelender Prouzin had written that musical instruments were the usual gift to an entertainer puppet, and Sir Hereward supposed that one might be of interest to Mister Fitz, who was quite capable of appearing to be an entertainer puppet. He could sing most sweetly and seemingly play any musical instrument, and dance fascinatingly as well. But Mister Fitz was not an entertainer puppet, and usually only deployed these talents as a ruse or deception, shortly before unleashing his other, even more greatly developed skills as a practitioner of arcane arts that were not generally the province of puppets. Or of people, for that matter.

"Oh, I'm not allowed to come into your room, sir," exclaimed Lallit. "Sister Gobbe is most strict about who may handle patients, and Mister Fitz told me of your vow, and I would not wish to accidentally —"

"My vow?" asked Sir Hereward suspiciously. He thought for a moment, then asked, "Ah, which one? I have…made several."

"To not share the breath of a woman, by intent or accident—save a consecrated priestess of course—till you have finished your pilgrimage to the Rood of Bazynghame," said Lallit innocently. "Don't worry, I shall breathe ever so softly, and stay in the doorway."

"I am grateful," said Sir Hereward, though he felt quite the opposite emotion.

"About this present for Mister Fitz…"

"Perhaps it is all too difficult," said Sir Hereward, whose affection for the puppet had encountered a sudden reverse. He turned his head to the side and sighed heavily. "I shall simply wish him a happy birthday and leave it at that."

"But there is an instrument in the attic," said Lallit. "In the same chest your book came from, there is a mandora…or a gallichon…of five strings, such as my uncle plays. Though it is perhaps too large and heavy for Mister Fitz."

Sir Hereward thought of several occasions when Mister Fitz had shown his true strength. He remembered those spindly wooden puppet arms inside Mister Fitz's thin coat, the cuffs sliding back as he lifted the Arch-Priest of Larruk-Agre above his bulbous head and threw him

into the mouth of the volcano; or the time when Fitz had beheaded a slave gladiator below the arena pits of Yarken. The look of surprise on the fellow's face had matched Sir Hereward's own expression, for Mister Fitz had been standing on the gladiator's head at the time, and had pulled the tip of the man's own blade back…

"I can fetch it down," said Lallit, interrupting his reminiscences. "Sister Gobbe would set a fair price, I'm sure."

"Very well," said Hereward. "A fine mandora might be the very thing. If it is not too much trouble, I would like to see it. When is Sister Gobbe returning?"

"Oh, I will fetch it for you now," said Lallit. "Sister Gobbe won't be back for hours yet."

"My thanks," said Sir Hereward. "But how will you hand it to me, if we must not share our breath?"

"Oh, I can hold my breath for ages," said Lallit innocently. She demonstrated, taking a deep breath that thrust out her chest. Sir Hereward watched in admiration, tempered by his annoyance at Mister Fitz. It was uncharacteristic of the puppet to preemptively meddle in Hereward's amorous affairs, and it galled no less to know it was almost certainly for a good reason.

Lallit held her breath for quite some time, before suddenly exhaling, turning her head so her breath went up the stairs. She smiled and followed it up to the attic. A minute later, Hereward heard her footsteps as she looked around, the oak-planked floor of the attic being the ceiling of his room.

The novice returned a few minutes later, carrying a stringed instrument that looked to Sir Hereward like an oversize lute. He could play the lute somewhat, and sing passably, as Mister Fitz graded his voice, but the knight had done neither for some years.

Lallit paused for an intake of breath and the resultant inflation of her habit at the door, then nimbly crossed the room, deposited the mandora on the end of Hereward's bed, and retreated as swiftly back to the stair.

Hereward leaned forward and took up the instrument. The mandora was made of ash with an open rose of ebony inlaid around the sound hole. It was still strung, which surprised him, for it had presumably been there for some lengthy time, and the strings were of a material other than gut, one that he could not immediately recognize.

He was about to pluck a note when he saw that the sound hole was obstructed, and that there was something inside the body of the mandora. Closer investigation revealed it to be a parchment folded into a triangle, which was sealed with wax at each corner. It could not be removed without de-stringing the instrument, which meant that it

had been put there on purpose, and the mandora strung thereafter.

"Aha," said Sir Hereward. "A mystery within the mandora."

"What is it?" asked Lallit. The novice stood on tiptoe, craned her elegant neck, and took several steps closer.

"A parchment," said Sir Hereward. He held the mandora up to the nearer window, so the light fell more clearly through the sound hole. "Sealed three ways, and stuck to the body with a red tape and three further seals…I think perhaps this is a matter for…"

He had been going to say "Mister Fitz," for the sealed parchment smacked of sorcery, but as the true nature of the puppet was best not revealed even to the servants of friendly gods, he fell silent.

"Oh, it is exciting!" said Lallit. She clapped her hands together and took a further step toward him. "What is written on the parchment?"

Sir Hereward carefully rested the mandora across his knees, and thought. There was something not quite right about Lallit's enthusiasm, the parchment, and the mandora. He noticed that the instrument's strings were humming slightly, though he had not struck them. They appeared to be aping Lallit's enthusiasm, and Sir Hereward did not like this at all.

Nor on closer examination was he sure that it was the same Lallit who had returned from the attic. She looked a little taller, and thinner, and now that he studied her, he could see that her eyes were too far apart, and her hat was on backward.

"I shall have to remove the strings," said Sir Hereward. "To get the parchment out. I believe there is a spanner in my saddlebag…I shall just fetch it."

Sir Hereward's saddlebags were propped against the far wall, under the shuttered window on that side, as were his saber and two holstered wheel-lock pistols, though unfortunately these were neither primed nor loaded.

"Allow me," said Lallit.

Sir Hereward held up his hand as he swung his legs off the bed. "No, no, remember my vow."

He hopped over on his right foot, and caught hold of the shutter bolt.

"Might as well have a little more sunshine, while the weather holds," said Sir Hereward. He did not think that the thing that had assumed the shape of Lallit would be deterred by sunlight, given that the other window was already open, but more might help. He opened the shutter, knelt down by his saddlebag, and cast a smiling glance back over his shoulder.

The light from the second window had no visible effect upon his visitor, but it did allow him to see very clearly that the woman in the

door was neither Lallit, nor actually a woman. It was some kind of other-dimensional entity that had assumed the shape of Lallit, and stolen her clothes. Hereward hoped Lallit was still alive in the attic, just as he hoped he would live through whatever was about to occur.

"It's very good of your god Narhalet-Narhalit to look after me so well," added Sir Hereward. He leaned into the window alcove, and looked out as if idly surveying the ground beneath. Saying the god's name might help bring its attention to this intruder in its temple. "Narhalet-Narhalit is good to look after my companion, Mister Fitz, as well."

He said "Mister Fitz" quite loudly, for the puppet's senses were extraordinarily sharp. If he was anywhere nearby, he would be alerted. But he was probably off in his sea cave, which meant Sir Hereward must manage on his own.

"The spanner," said Lallit. The thing was having trouble keeping its voice human. "The strings. The parchment."

"Ah yes," said Sir Hereward. He bent down to his saddlebag, and began to rummage through it, removing items as he went, as if to make it easier.

"Let me see. A dagger, needs a bit of sharpening…another dagger, this one's not too bad…where is that—"

He sensed a sudden movement behind him, and spun about on his good foot, the daggers in his hands. The thing was in front of him, losing its human form as it moved, its claws reaching for his arms. Hereward parried with the daggers, felt the shock of impact, and was borne back to the window and almost thrown out of it.

"You will get the parchment for me!" shrieked the thing. Flesh was melting off it, revealing the scaly, skeletal beast within, a creature not wholly present on the earth, for Hereward's daggers, ensorcelled as they were, were slowly sinking through its wrists, the scales reforming behind the passage of the steel.

"Never!" shouted Hereward, quickly followed by, "Mister Fitz! To me! Narhalet-Narhalit, aid me!"

"You will obey!" shrieked the beast, and bit at Hereward's shoulder. He twisted away, but its teeth raked through his night-shirt and tore flesh. At the same time, his daggers lost all purchase on the creature's wrists. Instantly, it went for him again, and he only managed to avoid its grasp by suddenly slipping down the wall and sliding between the creature's legs. He was attempting to roll away when it latched on to his back, dragged him up, and threw him on the bed.

"Remove the strings and open the parchment," it instructed him. "Or you shall be hurt, and hurt again, until you obey!"

Hereward gaped. It was not in response to the creature's

command, but an inadvertent reaction to the sudden arrival of a completely naked yet literally radiant Lallit. Surrounded by a nimbus of the violet hue favored by her god, she burst into the room and made a swatting motion in the air, as if crushing a mosquito.

A hole appeared in the creature's chest, followed by a geyser of greenish ichor that splashed the end of Sir Hereward's bed, the stained linen immediately beginning to send up small tendrils of evil-smelling smoke.

Despite what would be a mortal injury to a human, the beast was not distressed. It turned away from Sir Hereward and tensed to spring at Lallit.

Before it could do so, Hereward jumped up and smashed it on the head with *The Compendium of Commonplaces*, it being the only makeshift weapon close at hand. The huge, brass-and-leather-bound book boomed like a gong as it struck the monster, and most of the tome turned to ash in Hereward's hands, leaving him clutching a ragged folio of loosely bound pages, without any binding or brass accoutrements.

Hereward dropped the newly slim volume and dove for his saber. He drew it and spun about, ready to slash, but there was nothing there to hit. The creature had also turned to ash, had been picked up by a doubtlessly divine wind, and was being carried out the closest window, to be spread to the four corners of the earth.

The nimbus around Lallit faded, her knees buckled, and Hereward was just able to hop forward and catch her as she fell. However, he could not hold her weight with his injured foot, so both of them toppled back into the bed, just as Mister Fitz peered cautiously around the doorway, a sorcerous needle held in his cupped hand, its inhuman brilliance quickly dulled as he took in the situation.

But as the puppet replaced the needle inside his pointy hat, the small guard with the large ax leapt up the last step, his weapon held ready to use on anyone who violated the purity of the temple's novices.

"But I haven't…" protested Sir Hereward. He reluctantly released Lallit, and started patting out the incipient fire at the end of the bed. "We didn't…"

"What am I doing here?" asked Lallit wonderingly. She had the look of someone still waking from a dream. "I felt the god…"

"Narhalet-Narhalit has been here," confirmed Mister Fitz. He looked at the guard, his little blue-painted eyes sharp on his papier-mâché head. "This is the god's business, Jabek, however it may appear."

"Aye, I feel it so," said Jabek. He smiled, and added, "But I'll ask you to explain it to Sister Gobbe."

“Oh, the mandora is broken!” exclaimed Lallit. She picked up the instrument, whose neck was broken, and cradled it to her. “Sir Hereward wanted to give it to you for your birthday, Mister Fitz.”

“A birthday present?” asked Mister Fitz. “For me?”

“According to the book I was reading, sorcerous puppets have a common birthday,” said Sir Hereward. “The fourth day of the Second Month.”

“But I am not a common puppet,” said Mister Fitz. “Nor can it be said that I was born on any particular day, given my gradual ascent to full sentience over the course of my making. Besides, those other puppets have their birthday on the fifth day of the Second Month.”

Hereward shrugged, grimacing as he felt a pang from the wound in his shoulder and a renewed ache in his foot.

“I appreciate the thought,” said Mister Fitz. “Now, tell me. This broken mandora doubtless figures in the strange events that have just come to pass?”

“There is a triangle-folded thrice-sealed missive inside,” said Hereward. “Which is strange enough, and stranger still when you consider yonder book, which until I hit that shade-walker, or whatever it was, was a much larger volume.”

“I remember opening the chest to pick up the mandora, and nothing since,” said Lallit. “Perhaps I may take your second blanket for a robe, Sir Hereward?”

“Pray do not cloak your beauty on my account…” began Sir Hereward, then, as Jabek of the Ax shifted noisily behind him, hastily added, “I mean, please do.”

Mister Fitz crouched over the remnants of the book, flipping the pages with one of Sir Hereward’s daggers. He then examined the mandora.

“It is simple enough,” he said. “The book—which I am surprised you did not note is set in that type called Sorcery and thus highly suspect—is part of the revenge upon their creditors set in play by the sorcerer-merchants of Jerreke. Forced into slavery by their own economic ineptitude, they contrived to bind twinned otherworldly entities to their service. One would be constrained within a book or some such household item, the other in an instrument, or perhaps a game set. The items would be sent separately to the chosen target, in the hope that this would enable them to bypass any sorcerous protections. When both were in proximity, the bonds would release the entities, who would slay everyone within reach.”

“But only one entity came forth,” said Sir Hereward. “And it didn’t try to kill me, at least not at first. It wanted me to open the parchment that was inside the mandora.”

“The sorcerer-merchants of Jerreke were famous as inept

merchants and ineffective sorcerers," sniffed Mister Fitz. "In this case, the spell was set off long ago, but due to the botched execution, only one entity was released. Realizing its twin was still entrapped within the mandora, it had to wait inside the chest for the opportunity to make someone else release its companion. Neither Sister Gobbe, who initially brought you the book, nor Lallit, both being in the eye of her god, would be suitable persons to release the twin, so it came down to you. However, by breaking the item that had once held it in bond—the book, or rather the outer pages bound around these remains—you immediately banished it."

"But the twin is still trapped inside the mandora?" asked Sir Hereward.

"Indeed," said Mister Fitz. "And as, of course, it is a listed entity, albeit a minor one…"

"Yes," said Sir Hereward. "Lallit, Jabek, if you would excuse us for a few minutes?"

"Certainly, Sir Hereward," said Jabek. He turned and left at once. Hereward helped Lallit to stand, holding her perhaps a little closer than was necessary. She looked him in the eye as she stood up, and smiled.

"I am sorry about your vow, Sir Hereward," she said. Her breath was very sweet, and the blanket very loose upon her body. "I have a vow also, as do all the novices of Narhalet-Narhalit…that until we are consecrated, we shall not…"

"I know," said Sir Hereward, with a glance at Mister Fitz. "I mean, I know now. Best you be going, Lallit."

"If it were not for the god's presence, reminding me of what I will become, I might have forgotten that vow," whispered Lallit. Then she was gone, wafting past him.

Hereward sighed, hopped over to his saddlebag, and got out a silk armband, a brassard embroidered with sorcerous symbols that shone with their own light, though this was faint under the sun's bright shaft that came in through the northern window.

"Should I fix your shoulder first?" asked Mister Fitz, as he took his own brassard out from under his hat, and slid it up his arm.

"It's only a trifle. I think that Nar-Nar has already stopped it bleeding," said Sir Hereward. He gave a grunt of pain that lessened the effect of this statement, twitching his shoulder as he settled the brassard above his elbow. "I may well get another wound in the next few minutes, to keep you busy. Now, will you open the parchment and I shall strike it on the head with the mandora?"

"Yes," said Mister Fitz, his slim puppet fingers reaching in through the now-slack strings to pull out the sealed triangle. He held it ready, and looked at Sir Hereward. "But first…"

“I know, I know,” grumbled Sir Hereward. “What’s the thing’s name? Or do I just say ‘Summoned Antagonist’?”

Mister Fitz looked at the parchment for a long second. His painted eyes could see many more things than any human gaze, both in and beyond the ordinary world.

“Hypgrix the Second.”

“Right.”

Sir Hereward picked up his saber and set it ready on the bed, just in case, before holding the mandora high above the parchment. Then he spoke, the words coming as they always did, familiar and strong, the symbols on his and Mister Fitz’s brassards growing brighter with every word.

“In the name of the Council of the Treaty for the Safety of the World, acting under the authority granted by the Three Empires, the Seven Kingdoms, the Palatine Regency, the Jessar Republic, and the Forty Lesser Realms, we declare ourselves agents of the Council. We identify the godlet manifested in this parchment of Jerreke, as Hypgrix the Second, a listed entity under the Treaty. Consequently, the said godlet and all those who assist it are deemed to be enemies of the World and the Council authorizes us to pursue any and all actions necessary to banish, repel, or exterminate the said godlet.”

Mister Fitz broke the seals on the parchment of “godlet,” and even as the creature within boiled up like smoke and began to coalesce into something resembling flesh, Sir Hereward brought the mandora down upon it. Both beast and instrument immediately turned to dust, Mister Fitz gestured, and the dust blew out the window and was gone.

Sir Hereward winced as he sat back down on the bed, and looked at Mister Fitz.

“Now, tell me,” he said. “Why are you covered in salt?”

“Salt?” asked Mister Fitz. “It is not salt, but powdered bone and chalk. I have been digging in the tomb of some ancient, vasty creatures. It has been most interesting. Though not, it is clear, as exciting as your reading.”

“Perhaps not,” said Sir Hereward. He lay back on the bed, and pointed at a long wooden case that lay on the floor near his saddlebag. “If you can spare yourself from your digging, what say you to a game of kings and fools?”

Mister Fitz’s pumpkin-size head slowly rotated on his ridiculously thin neck, and his blue eyes peered at Sir Hereward’s face.

“So soon after your last defeat? You are transparent, Here-ward, but I doubt you have found some real advantage. The better player always wins.”

“We shall see,” said Sir Hereward. “Please lay out the set, and if

you would be so kind, call down for ale."

"Oh, and put this back in its place," said Sir Hereward, stripping the brassard from his arm. "I trust that I will not need it, at least until we reach Bazynghame?"

"Best keep it near," said Mister Fitz, as he picked up the game box. "There is the small matter of what I was digging for—and what I have found…"